



UTD alum dies after stealing, crashing airplane

ANDRÉ AVERION
Mercury Staff

Logan Timothy James stole an aircraft from the ATP Flight School at Addison Airport on Jan. 24, according to the Texas Department of Public Safety, before dying in a crash nine miles northeast of Telephone, Texas.

Prior to the incident, James was cleared to perform touch-and-go maneuvers in a single engine Cessna 172 Skyhawk near the airport, but after the first landing and takeoff at 6:54 p.m., James changed course and relayed his last recorded message to Addison Tower air traffic control at 7:04 p.m. In the recording, James says he is headed to East Texas before the audio abruptly cuts off.

"Career track 655 is actually going to depart to the east," James said. "I'm climbing up through the clouds and then just gonna end outside of everything. And as of about right now, you'll probably realize that I'm not going to listen to y'all's instructions, and I'm just heading to East Texas and a career track. So I'm gonna pull the Com 1 circuit breaker and the Com 2 circuit breaker right here soon ... and as soon as I unkey the mic..."

After the transmission, the air traffic controller tried to contact James four times in the next 10 minutes, with no reply.

The Texas Department of Public Safety determined that the plane crashed approximately 90 minutes later in a remote field near the Texas-Oklahoma border, 83 miles from where James took off. James was pronounced dead at the scene at 8:26 p.m., and there were no injuries to anyone on the ground.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the pilot's family, loved ones, friends and colleagues," the ATP Flight School said in a statement to CBS.

James was born and raised in Stokesdale, North Carolina. In spring 2023, he obtained a bachelor's degree from EPPS at

SEE CRASH, PAGE 3

DEMOCRATS DEBATE



From left to right: Butcher, Williams, Johnson and Moore discuss various domestic and foreign policy issues during the Jan. 18 congressional debate. The four candidates are vying for a seat in the House of Representatives for Texas' 32nd district which includes UTD as well as parts of Dallas and Collin County.

Candidates vie for House seat among calls for ceasefire

Four candidates running for TX-32 debated Jan. 18. Students will be able to vote in the primaries on March 5, 2024.



Above: Community members and UTD SJP affiliates raise signs that spell out "CEASE FIRE NOW" during the debate, prompting commentary from candidates about the Israel-Hamas war. Below: Students for Justice in Palestine Secretary Nour Saad interrupts Julie Johnson's final remarks to call her out on hypocrisy; police at the event escort her out afterwards.



"I would love to see a ceasefire. We have to have compassion for all people, but Israel has a right to defend itself and Hamas has to go. **"**

— Rep. Julie Johnson

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
News Editor

Four democratic candidates dug into policy issues at the first Texas 32 congressional debate on Jan. 18, 2024 as each vied for the seat. Rep. Colin Allred will leave behind in his bid for senate. Candidates disagreed on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the recent U.S. bombing of Yemen; members of UTD's Students for Justice in Palestine chapter called for a ceasefire and were escorted out by police.

Brian Williams, Rep. Julie Johnson, Justin Moore and Callie Butcher were the only candidates invited to speak, out of 10 running in the Democratic primary. Congressional District 32 includes the entirety of the UTD campus as well as parts of Dallas, Collin and Denton counties. Williams works as a trauma surgeon, Butcher and Moore are both experienced lawyers, and Johnson currently serves in the Texas House of Representatives. The candidates were asked for their perspectives and policy approaches to immigration, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, gun control, abortion and healthcare, recent American missile strikes against Yemen, economic inequality and how to overcome gridlock in Congress.

While the candidates were responding to a question about the humanitarian crisis

SEE DEBATE, PAGE 3

Professor's teaching license under investigation for sexual texts

Jeffrey Miranda, a former high school teacher, is under investigation by the Texas Education Agency. He was fired from Allen HS

JACK SIERPUTOWSKI
Managing Editor

The Texas Education Agency is investigating a UTD art professor's teaching license for sending sexual texts to a high school student while teaching at Allen ISD in 2020.

In December 2020, a student at Allen High School accused art teacher Jeffrey Mi-

randa of sending her inappropriate text messages, and while he was not tried in criminal court, Allen ISD fired Miranda over the accusation. At the time, the student was 18 and Miranda was 39. Miranda has worked as a professor at UTD every year since 2013, including spring 2024. His teaching license

Crabtree recommended that it be revoked. *The Mercury* was unable to reach Miranda for comment.

"He seems like such a great guy," said the student from Allen High School, who did not wish to be named. "And then he just abuses that trust that he builds, you know?"

According to a probable cause affidavit from Allen Police Department, a student

submitted an anonymous tip to the Tip411 line on Jan. 13, 2021 saying that a teacher had been sending her inappropriate text messages. After she borrowed art supplies from Miranda, the student said, he later messaged her on Facebook asking her to talk with him on WhatsApp. Over the course of several days in December 2020, Miranda asked her about orgasms and how pleasurable

they are for women. He also asked her to pick him up so they could "joy ride" and suggested they Zoom call so Miranda could draw her naked. The affidavit said that between responses, Miranda sent the student drawings of nude women.

"Tell me how do you know about cumming: Lol! Just Curiously <emoji>

SEE MIRANDA, PAGE 3

Democratic debate planned for UTD unexpectedly moved, sparks tension

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
News Editor

On Jan. 18, UTD Democrats planned for four congressional candidates for D-32 to debate at UTD, which is located within the district. Instead, the debate was moved off campus the day before by Richardson Area Democrats; students and local politicians are saying the move "disenfranchises" students and impedes civic outreach.

Meadow Pena and Isabella Spartz, president and vice president of UTD Dems, said that the club was previously defunct in spring 2023 after a fallout with RAD, and they were inspired to restart it after a campaign event with Aerie Bishop. As UTD Dems began to host events on campus,

Spartz and Pena said that RAD President Ginny Laughlin began to interact with UTD Dems more, asking them to promote RAD events in exchange for financial donations of \$75. In an interview, UTD Dems said that the money never came.

"I think it's just disappointing that something that was so accessible for students, something that was connecting students and meant for students and run by students, was pulled away by someone else's own ego," Spartz said.

While RAD is officially in charge of local Democratic party activity in Richardson, Laughlin said that they have a low youth turnout rate, according to text messages sent to Pena. In contrast, UTD Dems has signed up more than 200 Comets at their

voter registration drives. UTD Dems has also brought candidates like Aerie Bishop, Brian Williams, Callie Butcher, and Derek Avery to campus.

After UTD Dems announced that the event was cancelled, Francine Ly, Theresa Bui, Aerie Bishop and Tsion Amare – all political candidates in the area around campus – said they were disappointed with the move. Ly said the move wasn't necessarily unusual, since local elections are often under-publicized and heavily influenced by organizers, who determine what type of outreach will be attempted.

"I was so disappointed that the debate was moved," Ly said. "This is how the mechanism works, candidates and the party don't reach out properly until the election is



Members of UTD Dems stand with Callie Butcher at UTD. The congressional debate was meant to be in the SSA Auditorium, but was moved to the event center in Funasia.

Event Center inside Funasia, which can only accommodate a maximum of 250 people. Approximately 150 people attended the debate, which falls below the approximately 200 RSVPs received by UTD Dems.

On Jan. 12 Pena and Spartz sent RAD an email asking to clarify final issues before the

SEE DEMS, PAGE 3



THE MERCURY

UTDMERCURY.COM

Volume XXIII
No. 12
Editor-in-Chief
Fatimah Azeem
editor@utdmerry.com
(972) 883-2287Managing Editor
Jack Sierputowski
managingeditor@utdmerry.com
(972) 883-2227Graphics Editor
Katherlyn Ho
graphics@utdmerry.comPhoto Editor
Katya Zakar
photo@utdmerry.comCopy Editor
Fiyin OlajideNews Editor
Gregorio Olivares
Gutierrez
news@utdmerry.comLife and Arts
Editor
Mia Nguyen
life@utdmerry.comOpinion Editor
Maria Shaikh
opinioneditor@utdmerry.comWeb Editor
Rainier Pederson
web@utdmerry.comDistribution
Manager
André Averion
distro@utdmerry.comSocial Media
Manager
Anika Sultana
media@utdmerry.comContributors
Aafiya Aslam
Gregory Binu
Tyler Burkhardt
Grace Cowger
Yi Yi Ding
Aarav Dev
Navya Grandhe
Erin Gutschke
Zara Jamshed
Ann Jayan
Hyun Lim
Paola Martinez
Sofia Meinardus
Madabuchi Okoro
Nahum Pilli
Alana Platt
Jarin Priyosha
Kavya Racheti
Shreya Ravi
Surjajitay Sarkar
Anika Sultana
Rachel Woon

iWeek Event Blotter

Feb. 19 - Passport to the World

- This event is an international festival that highlights a variety of cultures through music, foods and other activities and performances. The event will start at 1 p.m.

A

Feb. 19 - Smash Cricket

- A Smash Cricket game will take place from 6 p.m. - 12 a.m. with volunteer players. Player registration is required and can be done at Rec Center West from Jan. 27 - Feb. 15.

B

Feb. 20 - International Pop-Up Farmers Market

- A mini farmers market will be open with many local offerings of produce and fresh foods. The market will also sell premade items and ingredients inspired by international flavors and cuisines.

C

Feb. 20 - International Teaching Kitchen

- Intercultural Programs, Dining Services and a student chef come together to teach Comets to make chicken biryani and expand their cooking skills and their taste palettes.

D

Feb. 21 - Chinese Tea Ceremony and Calligraphy Workshop

- An exciting and educational opportunity to learn about the ceremonial way of preparing and drinking tea. This calming workshop will begin at 1 p.m. and is hosted by the Center for Asian Studies and Intercultural Programs.

E

Feb. 22 - African Movements for UT Dallas Community

- Participate in a dance class that focuses on African traditions of dance and drumming. The class will be taught from a master dancer and West African native, Cassandra Hines. No shoes are required and comfortable clothes are suggested.

F

Corrections/
Clarifications
Bring factual errors
or inaccuracies to the
attention of *The Mercury's*
staff by emailing editor@
utdmerry.com or
calling (972) 883-2287
and a correction will be
published in this space in
a future issue.Media Adviser
Jonathan Stewart
jonathan.stewart@utdallas.eduMailing Address
800 West Campbell
Road, SU 24
Richardson, TX
75080-0688Newsroom
Student Union,
Student Media
Suite
SU 1.601*The Mercury* is published
on Mondays, at two-week
intervals during the long
term of The University of
Texas at Dallas, except
holidays and exam periods,
and once every four
weeks during the summer
term.Advertising is accepted
by *The Mercury* on the
basis that there is no
discrimination by the
advertiser in the offering
of goods or services to any
person, on any basis prohibited
by applicable law. The
publication of advertising
in *The Mercury* does not constitute an
endorsement of products
or services by the newspaper
or the UTD administration.Opinions expressed in
The Mercury are those of
the editor, the editorial
board or the writer of the
article. They are not necessarily
the view of the UTD
administration, the
Board of Regents or the
Student Media Operating
Board.*The Mercury's* editors
retain the right to refuse
or edit any submission
based on libel, malice,
spelling, grammar and
style, and violations of
Section 54.23 (f) (1-6) of
UTD policy.Copyright © 2022.
The University of Texas
at Dallas. All articles,
photographs and graphic
assets, whether in print
or online, may not be
reproduced or republished
in part or in whole
without express written
permission.**TIPA**
Texas Intercollegiate Press
Association
The Mercury is a proud
member of both the Association
of Collegiate Press and the Texas
Intercollegiate Press
Association.

From The Mercury Archives: February 9, 1987

Why Africana History?

By John Henrik Clarke

Dr. Clarke's full article, by the same name, appears in the current issue of The Black Collegian. Permission has been granted for the use of the following excerpts. Dr. Clark, a preeminent African-American historian, is head of the Department of Black Studies at Hunter College of the City University of New York.

The phrase African-American or African-American History Month, taken at face value and without serious thought, appears to be incongruous. Why is there a need for an African-American History Month when there is no similar month for the other minority groups in the United States? The history of the United States in total, consists of the collective histories of minority groups. What we call 'American civilization' is no more than the sum of their contributions. The African-Americans are the least integrated and the most neglected of these groups in the historical interpretation of the Ameri-

can experience. This neglect has made African-American History Month a necessity.

According to most records, old and new, Africans are the oldest people on the face of the earth. The people now called Africans not only influenced the Greeks and the Romans, they influenced the early world before there was a place called Europe. Nearly every human empire that has arisen in the world, material and spiritual, has found some of its greatest crises on the continent of Africa. It was through Africa that Christianity became the religion of the world. It was through Africa that Islam came to play its great role of conqueror and civilizer.

Africa and its people are the most written about and the least understood of all the world's people. This condition started in the 15th and 16th centuries with the beginning of the slave trade and the colonialism system. These systems strained, but did not break the umbilical cord between the Africans in Africa and those who, by forced migration,

now live in what is called the Western World.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson became the Founder-Director of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1914. In 1926, he led the way and used what was then called Negro History week to call attention to his people's contribution to every aspect of world history. He conceived this special week as a time when public attention should be focused on the achievements of America's citizens of African descent. History tells people where they have been and what they have been. It also tells people where they are and what they are. Most importantly, history tells people where they still must go and what they still must be. Dr. Woodson was convinced that unless something was done to rescue the Black man from history's oversight, he would become a "negligible factor in the thought of the world." Dr. Woodson believed that there was no such thing as "Negro History." He said what was called "Negro History" was

only a missing segment of world history.

The African-American's role in the social, economic and political development of the American States is an important foundation upon which to build racial understanding, especially in areas in which false generalization and stereotypes have been developed to separate peoples rather than to unite them.

Africana or Black History should be taught every day, not only in the schools, but also in the home. African History Month should be every month. We need to learn about all the African people of the world, including those who live in Asia and the islands of the Pacific.

In the twenty-first century there will be over one billion African people in the world. We are tomorrow's people. But, we were yesterday's people, too. With an understanding of our new importance we can change the world, if we first change ourselves.

COMETS BLAZE A TRAIL IN RACING

Dallas Formula Racing allows students to grow their technical skills in a broad range of subjects.

SOFIA MEINARDUS
Mercury Staff

Strolling by ECSW, a glance through the center bottom-floor window reveals the construction of a competitive racing car — a glimpse into where intellect meets innovation. A dedicated group of students diligently collaborate on crafting the optimal vehicle.

Representing the Dallas Formula Racing group, a student-led organization at UTD established in 2014, these students are propelled into hands-on experiences in engineering and math. The collaboration spans four different schools at UTD, with 18 majors represented. At its core, DFR is more than a student organization — it's a community that fosters technical skills, teamwork and business acumen through designing a new car every year, said Rayyan Sappayani, mechanical engineering senior and former president of DFR. DFR allows students to participate in outreach events and to delve into specific aspects required to build the car including part design, data analysis, manufacturing, testing, marketing and fundraising.

"Through all this, our students get a lot of benefits such as internship opportunities, and job opportunities, but most importantly, they get to grow as engineers and as people," Sappayani said.

DFR faces off against other formula racing clubs internationally in the Formula SAE competition, hosted by the Society of Automotive Engineers. This Collegiate Design Series pushes students, challenging them to design, build and test these formula-style vehicles. Senior Alan Frias, majoring in electrical and electronics engineering and the Electrical EV lead for DFR, emphasized the hard work being done on the car for the Formula SAE competition with the payoff resulting in half the people on the DFR team landing internships with companies like Tesla and Apple. The competition includes technical inspections, racing events and business presentations. The business presentations focus on aspects like cost and design, with the DFR team being No. 1 in Texas for the 2022 Business Presentation component.

"If you want to do something, you got to do it yourself," Frias said. "Nobody's there to hold your hand, nobody's there to give you a free pass so you just got to do the work."

Manuel De Jesus Contreras, the EV Chief Engineer for DFR and an electrical engineering sophomore, said the team is accessible to students of all majors and experience levels. He credited his involvement with DFR in helping to secure a GM internship and expanding his on-campus engagement, including a research

assistant role.

"If you're a student at UTD who's interested in increasing their value for a potential employer, getting involved with some organization on campus is the way to go," Contreras said.

Dennis Yermakov, Business Director for DFR majoring in Computer Information Systems and Technology, mentioned Formula SAE not only promotes engineering excellence but also encompasses the entire automotive industry, from research design to marketing and finance. Within DFR, there are two specialized teams: the Electric Vehicle (EV) team and the Internal Combustion (IC) team. The business team is comprised of three areas: corporate relations, social media and events coordination and they work towards raising \$50,000-\$60,000 in funding each year to ensure the team can build the competition vehicle. In the annual 2023 Comets Giving Day, a fundraiser held by UTD, DFR raised \$11,000, more money than some of the UTD groups involved like the Physics department. Yermakov also noted that DFR helps to grow technical skills like modeling software and manufacturing as well as email etiquette and project management skills.

"It's all these kinds of skills which you can learn," Yermakov said. "You'll get a basic idea of it in your classes but it's nothing like what,

you'll see working in here, like I've heard it from some of the other engineers, they'll go out and work at their internships and whatever and it'll be like relatively easy compared to what they do here."

Sappayani also said DFR is involved in various projects ranging from rebuilding a 2019 vehicle with the freshman and sophomore team to venturing into the electric vehicle domain. For the team's 2025 project, they will redesign every aspect of the vehicle including the chassis, suspension, power chain and aerodynamics. They are currently 90% finished with the chassis and are on track to complete the entire car by March 9.

"Everything that we've been working for in the past two or three years has been to make sure that we can develop a car year in, year out, not just reuse designs," Sappayani said. "If we can get through this 2025 car, that's a big hallmark for sustainability."

DFR does not limit its impact to UTD; they also share their passion for engineering and math with the community. Over the past summer, DFR members went to an event in South Dallas, hosted by TD Jakes, Goldman Sachs, and the Dallas Mavericks for middle school students to learn about STEM and have some high school students on the team

who get early exposure to the stuff they do. DFR has also started working with JSOM capstone program allowing members of DFR to now complete their design or senior capstone projects with DFR, as well as being currently offered as a prescribed elective in the ECS school.

"I think, we're proving to ourselves that we can handle all of these projects opening up all these opportunities for our students, so we hope to get more of that support as we go forward because there's a lot of passion on the team," Sappayani said.

Sappayani said in the world of Dallas Formula Racing, crossing the finish line is only the beginning, as students continuously design a new car year in and year out. Outside of building the car, Yermakov and Contreras emphasized the amount of time spent with the people inside DFR that help to foster and build lasting connections beyond college.

"As long as you're interested and you're passionate and you're willing to learn and willing to work, everyone in here is more than happy to teach and more than happy to pass on their knowledge of everything they have learned from building this car," Yermakov said. "So just don't hesitate. Just go for it."

What's that construction north of the library?

As classes began for the spring 2024 semester, students discovered fences enclosing substantial parts of campus

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ

News Editor

As part of construction for the new Student Union, the Student Union Green, portions of the walkway adjacent to the Student Union, the Green Center and parking Lot G are all closed off. Demolition of these areas will begin in February.

Gene Fitch, Vice President of Student Affairs, said that the new SU and Student Success Center will be built in place of the Green Center and Lot G, and that the

Pub and the Green will be replaced with an expansion to the Gaming Center.

"Our first Student Union was opened in 1981 as I recall, when we had about 8,000 students," UTD President Richard Benson said. "We are about four times that size now. [The Student Union] building has served us well for a long time, but over the course of time we have seen an immense amount of growth as the students come faster than everything else."

In a meeting with Angie Chen Button,

who sponsored the bill that gave UTD the funding for the expansion, Benson and Fitch shared preliminary details regarding the building while remarking that a new student union is necessary to meet the needs of the student population.

"The construction is in part funded by the students," Benson said. "About a year and a half ago there was a referendum where students voted to raise their student union fee so that we could meet half our funding goals. The other half came from

the state government in which we needed to get approval in both the house and senate."

Demolition of The Pub and the Green Center will begin in mid to late February, according to Fitch. Without major delays, Fitch said that the construction should take approximately 18 months, with the new buildings set to open in fall 2026. This coincides with the projected opening of UTD's Silver Line DART station.

"It is going to be the largest building on campus at about 370,000 square feet in total," Fitch said.

Fitch said that groups currently housed in the SU will be moved into the new building, and that Student Government will get its own rooms. The new SU will include a dining area that seats 700 as well as a 14,000 square foot ballroom capable of accommodating up to 800 people for banquets.

MIRANDA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

excited," Miranda said in a message, according to Allen PD.

The Allen High School student said she initially met Miranda as a sophomore. She said she used to spend time in Miranda's classroom and discuss her relationships with him, and she saw him as a parental figure.

"He was such a father figure to me, 'cause my dad wasn't really there," the student said. "And he knew that, and it's like your dad doing it to you."

The student said that the first texts Miranda sent her were sexual, and after "shaking in tears," she decided to report him. The probable cause affidavit from Allen PD said that in between sexual messages, the student tried to "change subjects" and not respond to Miranda's comments. Between Dec. 4, 2020, and Jan. 13, 2021, she said she took screenshots of all the messages Miranda sent.

"There's no way I was the first one, is what I kept telling myself," the student said. "I'm gonna be the one that stands up."

The state pursued a charge of Improper Relationship between Educator and Student, which requires physical contact with the victim. On Aug. 17, 2021, a grand jury decided no bill, meaning they did not believe there was sufficient evidence to bring the charges to court.

According to a letter from the Allen ISD Board obtained by *The Mercury*, on Jan. 13, 2021, Allen High School Principal Matt Russell met with Miranda to discuss the allegations, which Miranda described as a "punch to the gut." In the meeting, Miranda denied texting the student and said he did not have WhatsApp. Two days later, Miranda admitted to sending the text messages and called his actions a "slip in judgement," the letter said. The district terminated him on Jan. 21. The Mercury reached out to Allen ISD regarding Miranda's employment, but a representative for the district declined to comment.

The Allen High School student said that when the original case dropped, it was "heartbreaking." She said she kept up with Miranda on the internet and that she con-

stantly feared he would come after her.

"In my head, I'd imagine him everywhere," the student said.

Before his firing, Miranda had worked for Allen ISD for 14 years. He obtained an MFA from UTD in 2010 and has worked as a lecturer at UTD since 2013. Catherine Parsonault, program coordinator for Visual and Performing Arts, said that Miranda was a routine rehire in 2022 and 2023. When *The Mercury* was first researching this story in 2022, Parsonault said that since criminal charges were never brought against Miranda, there was no legal reason not to rehire him.

"I think students need to understand that when a person has been incorrectly charged, and the charges are dropped, then we need to take that at face value," Parsonault said. "And if our own biases aren't based in fact, and if we don't know what the evidence is, then we have to ask ourselves, why do we feel uncomfortable?"

Parsonault said she spoke with Miranda over the phone and that he wanted to focus on university level teaching and "move for-

ward." Parsonault also said student evaluations of Miranda have been consistently good, a sentiment echoed by a student on Reddit who said Miranda was extremely friendly and helped them with career advice. A public information request revealed no grievances or complaints filed against Miranda as of November 2023. The six reviews posted for Miranda on RateMyProfessor are all positive, describing him as patient and encouraging.

"I've learned more in a semester than in my entire education prior," one commenter said. "He provides feedback in a manner that both constructively criticizes and encourages you to do better (rare in art teachers). Go to class; it's never boring and you'll always learn something new. Miranda is AWESOME!"

Miranda's teaching license is currently valid until 2025, although the online listing states he is under investigation by the TEA. The agency filed a petition against Miranda on behalf of the State Board for Educator Certification, as according to Texas Administrative Code, a person's teaching certificate

can be permanently revoked if they have "solicited any sexual contact or romantic relationship with a student or minor" — including making sexual comments about a student's body. According to transcripts of the texts from Allen High School, Miranda told the student, "Seriously...you got a hot body" and referred to her as a "Greek sculpture." Miranda attended a hearing regarding his license in September 2023, and as of the time of publication, the state board has returned the case to the TEA recommending they follow their proposal to revoke the license. According to Coursebook, Miranda is registered as teaching Figure Drawing in spring 2024.

"It pisses me off," the student from Allen High School said. "There's evidence that he's done terrible things, and they're just like, yeah, we'll just keep a better eye on him. As if he's a prized teacher."

This story is ongoing and will be updated when we have more information. If you have any tips, please contact Jack Sierputowski at managingeditor@utdmercury.com.

CRASH

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

UTD, majoring in Geospatial Information Sciences and graduating in the top 10% of the school. In June 2023, James began his training at the ATP Flight School at Addison Airport, and in November 2023, James acquired his Private Piloting License.

"After I graduate at UTD, I plan to go to flight school and work to earn a spot flying for a legacy carrier, such as Delta, American or FedEx," James wrote on his LinkedIn.

The Texas Department of Public Safety confirmed there were no other individuals in the plane with James. The Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board are investigating the incident to determine whether the crash was accidental.

or intentional and where in East Texas James intended to go. Meanwhile, the Addison Police Department is investigating how the theft of the Cessna 172 Skyhawk occurred.

"[Logan] was a wonderful son, with a gentle and loving spirit," his father Mark James said.

This is the fourth lethal plane crash to occur in DFW in the last three years. The previous crash occurred in November 2023, when a small plane crashed near the intersection of W Park Blvd and Midway Rd in Plano, Texas.

This story is ongoing and will be updated as *The Mercury* receives more information. If you have any tips, please reach out to editor@utdmercury.com and distro@utdmercury.com.

DEMS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

debate, including parking, recording of the event and the debate itinerary. At the time Spartz and Pena worked for the political campaign of a local Democratic candidate who had been working with RAD.

"We noticed that when we put our foot down and we didn't agree with them, that was when we were told that we were being rude, when our bosses got called, and [when] things started changing," Pena said.

After the email was sent, Spartz and Pena said that Laughlin called their supervisor in the campaign to complain about their rudeness when

working with her. Spartz said that they had to leave their jobs at the campaign to speak out about the issue.

"Instead of the campaign supporting us and not working with RAD anymore, they basically said, 'We won't make you work with them, but the campaign was still gonna continue to work with RAD,'" Spartz said.

Spartz and Pena said they wanted to platform Comets' voices by having a student as moderator; instead, RAD chose Grover Jeffers of *Dallas Morning News*. Laughlin said that a student could not serve as the moderator because the moderator had to be a local "celebrity-type person."

which she specified were not a novel concept. Moore discussed the need for both a legislative and a "holistic" approach — encouraging communities to police gun ownership in their own area. Moore said he has seen this strategy succeed in Chicago where he worked to reduce violence and promote gun buyback programs.

"In Chicago, I organized a gang peace rally," Moore said. "We challenged rival gangs to a ceasefire. Not only did they stop shooting each other, but they marched together against the proliferation of illegal guns in our streets."

All four candidates said they wanted to increase access to abortion and contraceptives and make healthcare more accessible; Johnson discussed restructuring the process of medical debt, Butcher spoke about implementing Medicare for all and protecting gender-affirming care and Moore discussed

making healthcare a human right.

"Healthcare should be a right that everyone has," Moore said. "Healthcare isn't just a medical issue, but also a financial one. U.S. healthcare creates this divide between the haves and the have-nots which carries through generations. We need healthcare that is affordable and accessible to everyone."

Williams again called out Johnson, this time on what he called her support for bills which restricted access to abortion and healthcare in Texas. VoteSmart's profile on Johnson shows she has a history of supporting abortion and a history of working to improve healthcare access in Texas.

"We need to enshrine a right to bodily autonomy," Butcher said. "Your healthcare shouldn't depend on what state you live in, and you should not be forced to flee the state you live in."

DEBATE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in Gaza, members of SJP and other community members raised signs which spelled out "CEASEFIRE NOW."

"I would love to see a ceasefire," Johnson said. "We have to have compassion for all people, but Israel has a right to defend itself and Hamas has to go."

Johnson and Williams expressed support for Israel's military actions while indicating a need for a ceasefire once Hamas is defeated. Butcher and Moore emphasized the need for humanitarianism, the need for a ceasefire and an opposition to what they called a genocide unfurling in Gaza. Moore said that Zionism in Israel has been as detrimental as white nationalism has been within the U.S.

"We call out the hypocrisy of representatives like Julie Johnson. What she is saying

by immediately following that [pro-ceasefire] sentiment with support for Israel's right to defend itself is an argument that has been used to justify the genocide," said Nour Saad, UTD graduate student and SJP board member.

"We do not stand for that incredibly dangerous and hypocritical sentiment which allows for the normalization of the genocide."

UTD students also interacted heavily with the debate during the closing statements. As Johnson gave her final remarks, a UTD SJP member stood up and interrupted Johnson by yelling "Are you saying that Israel has a right to defend itself?" The other activists sitting in the same row joined in and began chanting "ceasefire now" while holding signs as police arrived to escort them out of the building.

"America has to serve as the defender of democracy around the world," Williams

said. "And, like the Houthis, we are seeing threats to democracy everywhere."

Johnson and Williams expressed support for the American missile strikes against Ansar Allah in Yemen, while Butcher and Moore opposed Biden's approach in this situation and emphasized the need for diplomacy first.

"We don't have a good record in the Middle East," Butcher said. "How can we build trust if we continue to violently interfere?"

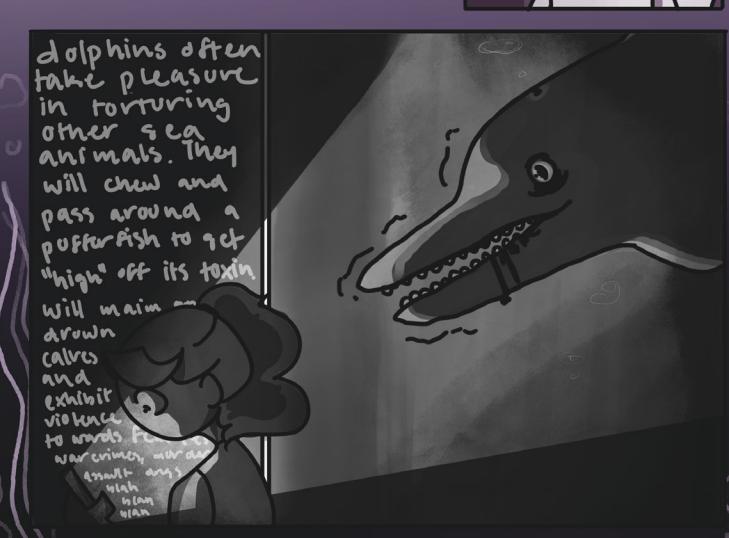
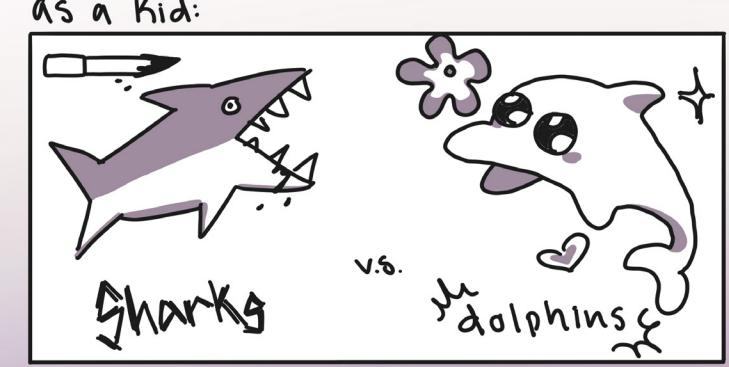
When discussing the need for stronger gun control legislation, Williams called out Johnson on what he called her support of Republican gun legislation. Johnson rebutted by emphasizing her 0% rating from the NRA and her record of support for stronger gun legislation. Butcher emphasized the need for universal background checks and measures like assault weapon bans

SNOW IN TEXAS



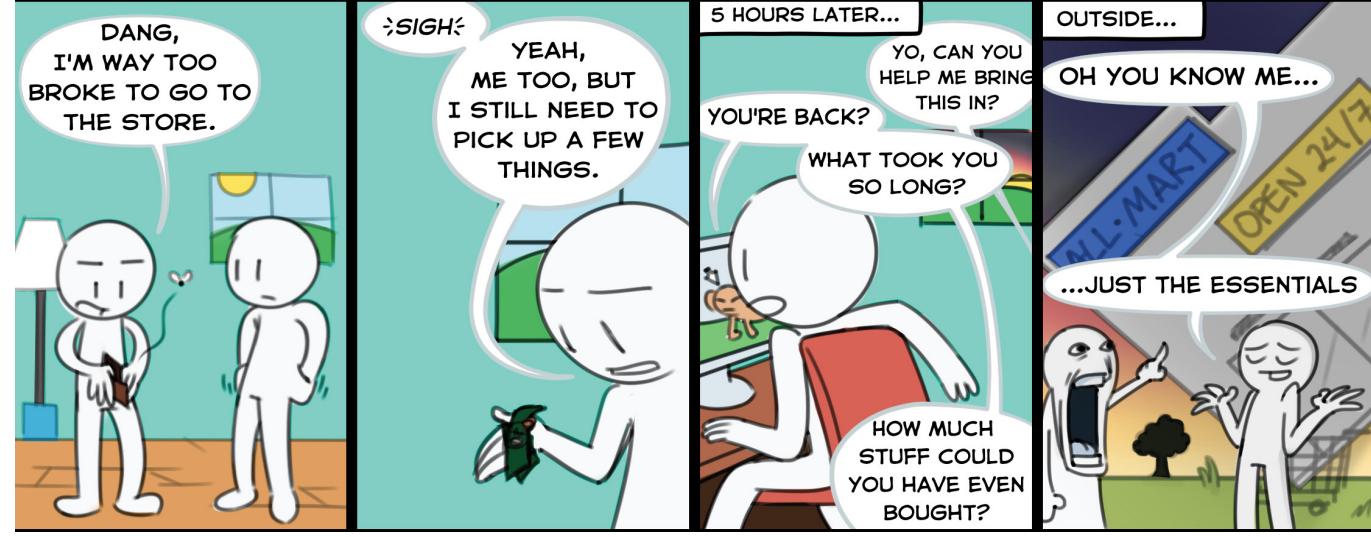
RACHEL WOON | MERCURY STAFF

SHARKS AND DOLPHINS: THEN VS. NOW



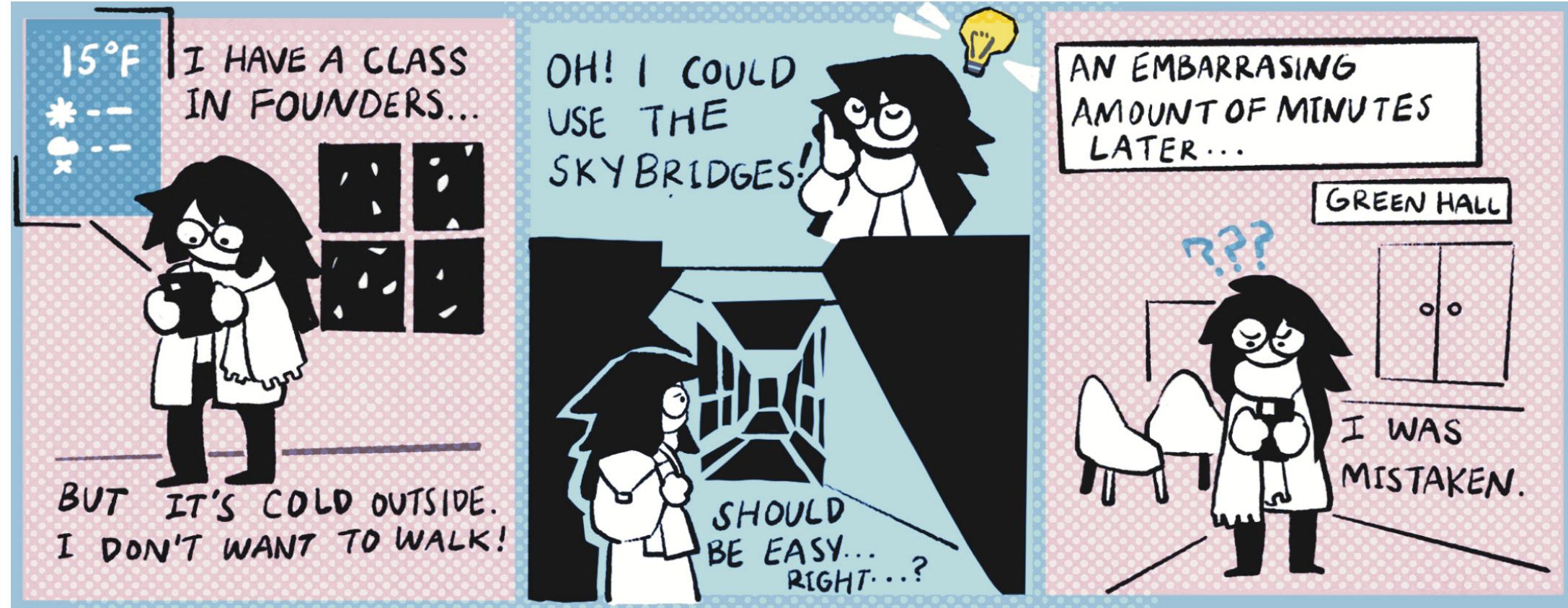
ANN JAYAN | MERCURY STAFF

JUST THE ESSENTIALS



MADABUCHI OKORO | MERCURY STAFF

SKYBRIDGE



YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

BUTTERS, GO POTTY!



ERIN GUTSCHKE | MERCURY STAFF

Student art showcase

Send your art to graphics@utdmercury.com to be featured

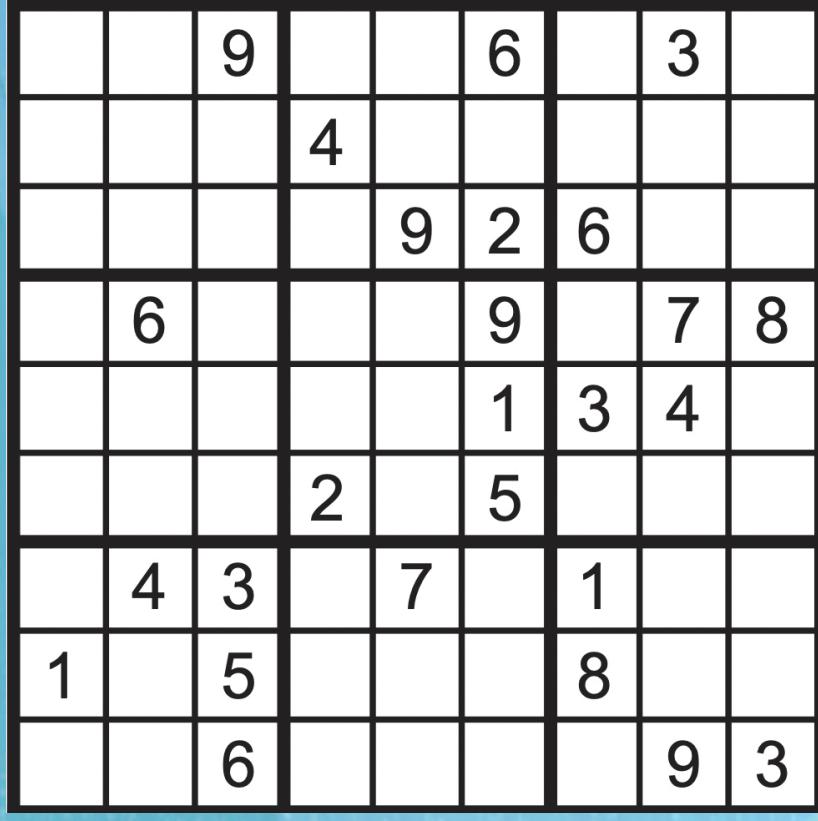
Chess Pac Man

Rules: Take all of the pawns with the opposing color piece to solve the puzzle.

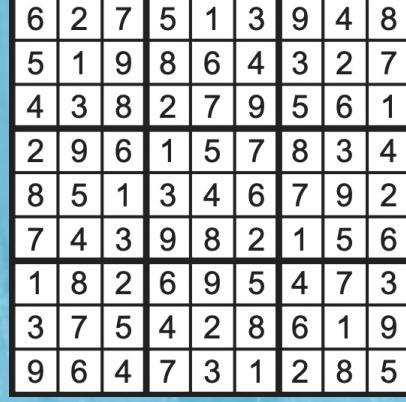
**CHESS PUZZLE BY AAFIYA ASLAM | MERCURY STAFF
CHESS PIECES BY YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF**



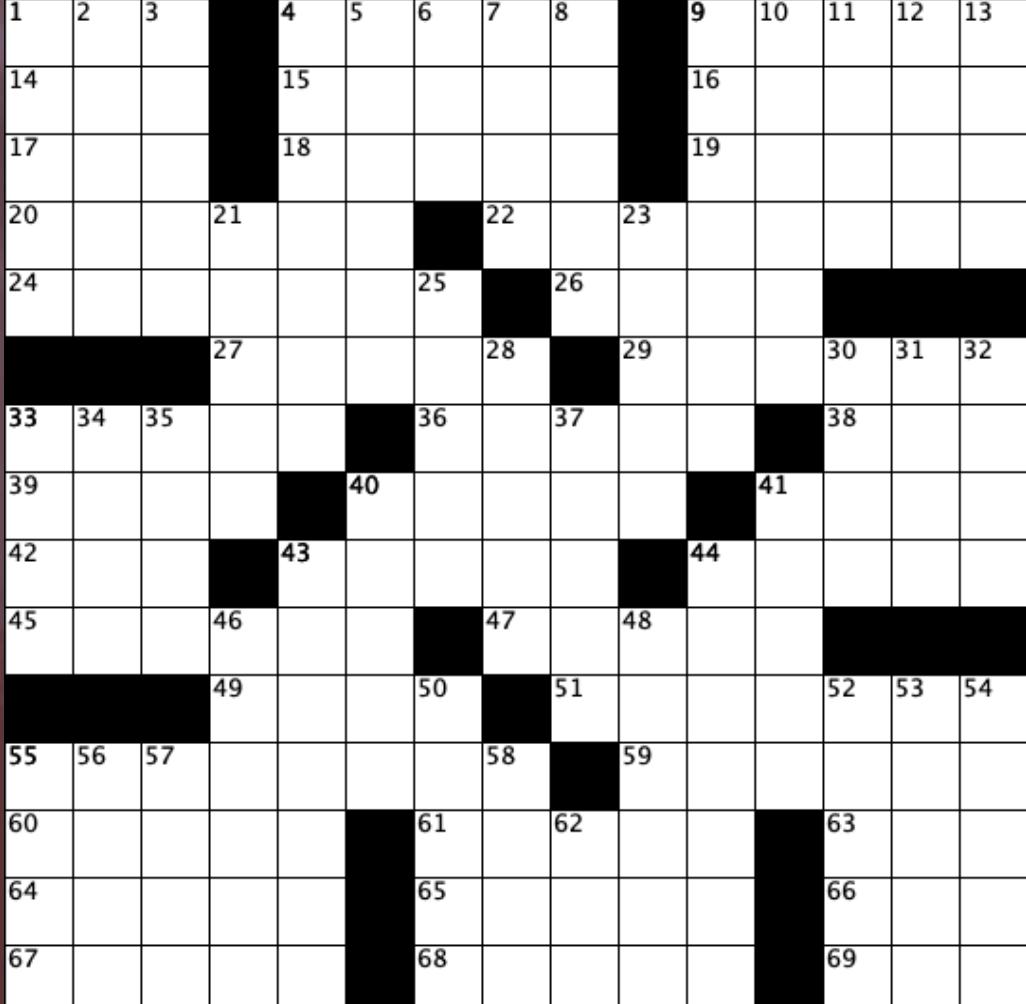
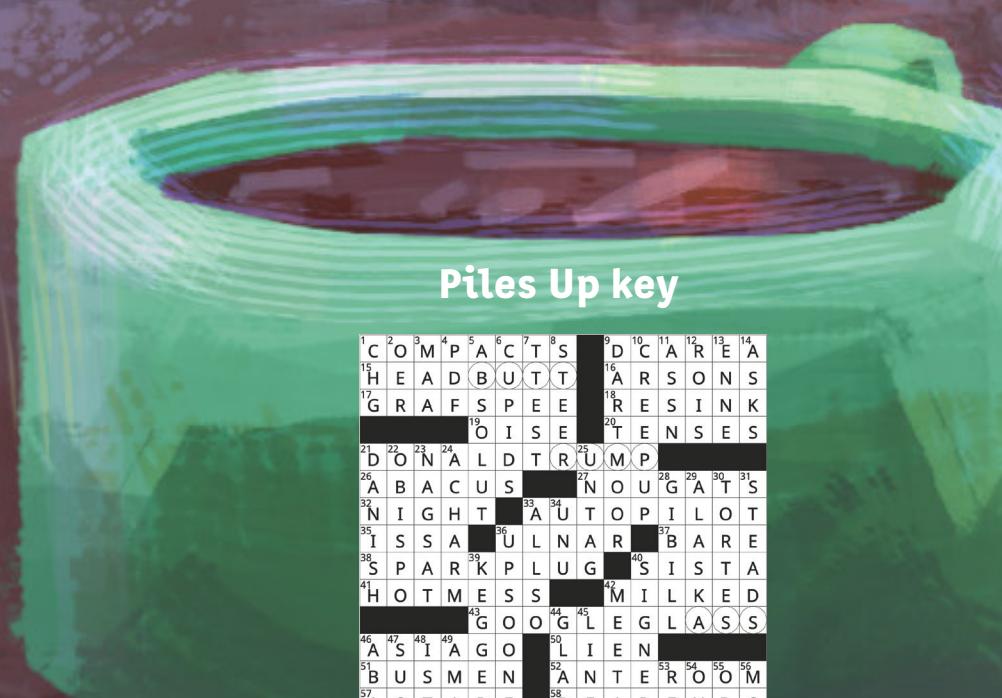
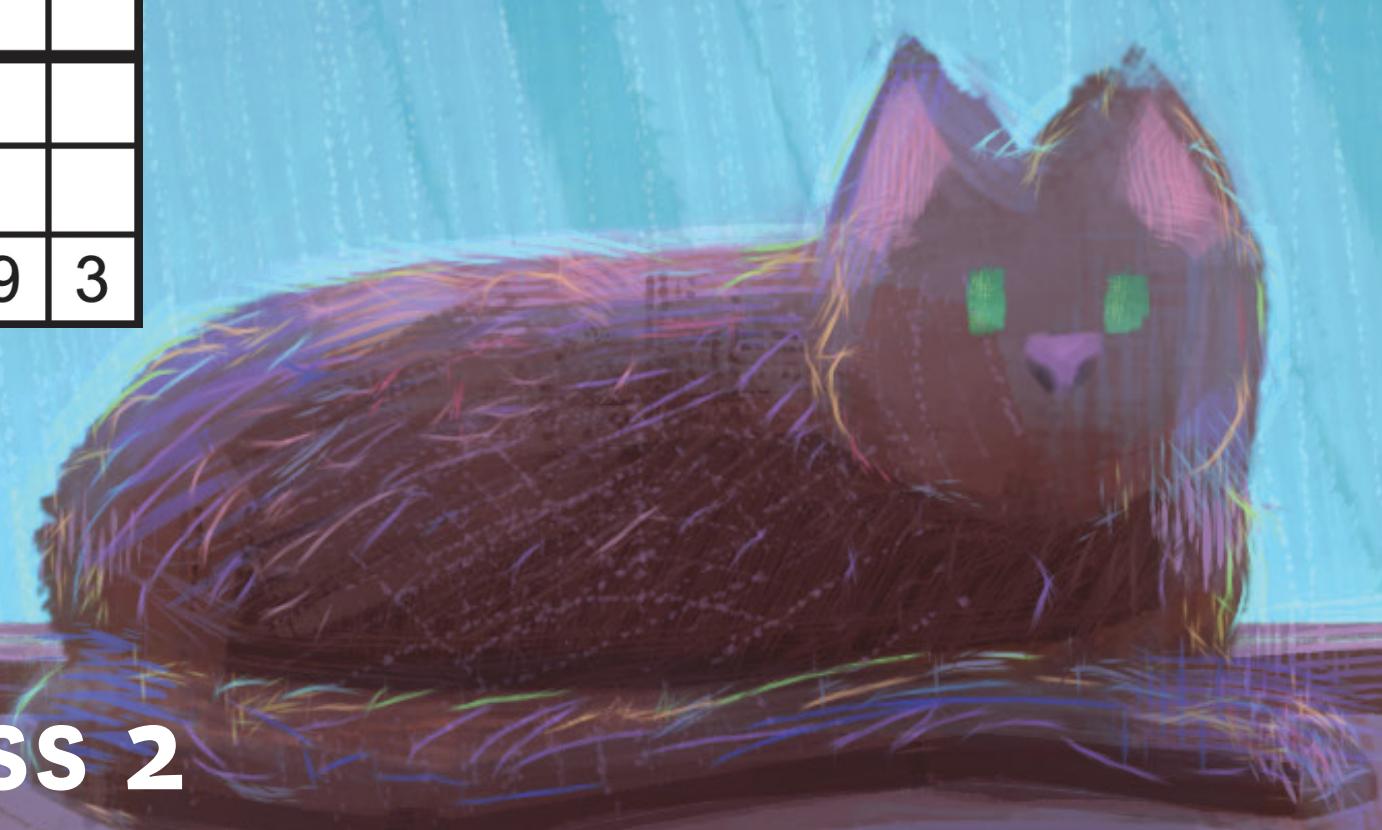
1.29 Sudoku



1.16 Sudoku key



Themeless 2



ALANA PLATT | MERCURY STAFF

Across

- 1 Small colleges
- 4 Occupied, as a desk
- 9 Homer epic
- 14 Works in a museum
- 15 One of the five senses
- 16 Drew of mystery novels
- 17 Neither here ____ there
- 18 Hawaiian hello
- 19 14 pounds, in Britain
- 20 ____ Johnson a.k.a. The Rock
- 22 Stole gas, as from a tank
- 24 Rings and things
- 26 "Yas queen ____!"
- 27 "The Tortoise and the Hare" writer
- 29 Clear as mud
- 33 Itsy-____
- 36 "Inferno" poet
- 38 Ashes holder
- 39 "You know it's not the same ____ was." (Harry Styles lyric)
- 40 One of the worst things to step on,

according to the internet

according to the internet

- 41 Japanese soup
- 42 D.C. VIP
- 43 Lama
- 44 Little bits
- 45 Decide one's had enough time outdoors
- 47 "Bye Bye Bye" boy band
- 49 Inquires
- 51 Amelia who went missing in the middle of Pacific Ocean
- 55 They have a point
- 59 Subtle difference
- 60 Saudi neighbor
- 61 Japanese mushroom
- 63 Text-scanning technology, briefly
- 64 Basic ideas
- 65 Crafted, as a basket
- 66 Beaver's creation
- 67 Doesn't leave
- 68 Pigs' digs
- 69 Hosp. areas

Down

- 1 Band-Aid co.
- 2 Russell of "Gladiator"
- 3 Proverbial backbreaker
- 4 __ cup (trendy beverage holder)
- 5 Many IM recipients
- 6 Yours, in Italy
- 7 German interjections
- 8 Bangkok residents
- 9 Fit
- 10 Sister of Michael and Janet Jackson
- 11 Knowing, as a secret
- 12 Skin breakout
- 13 Like blue hair
- 21 You may get a rise out of it
- 23 Schemes
- 25 Peak performance?
- 28 Heathen
- 30 Admit defeat
- 31 Word before "major" or "minor"
- 32 Son of Seth
- 33 Big party

34 "That makes sense"

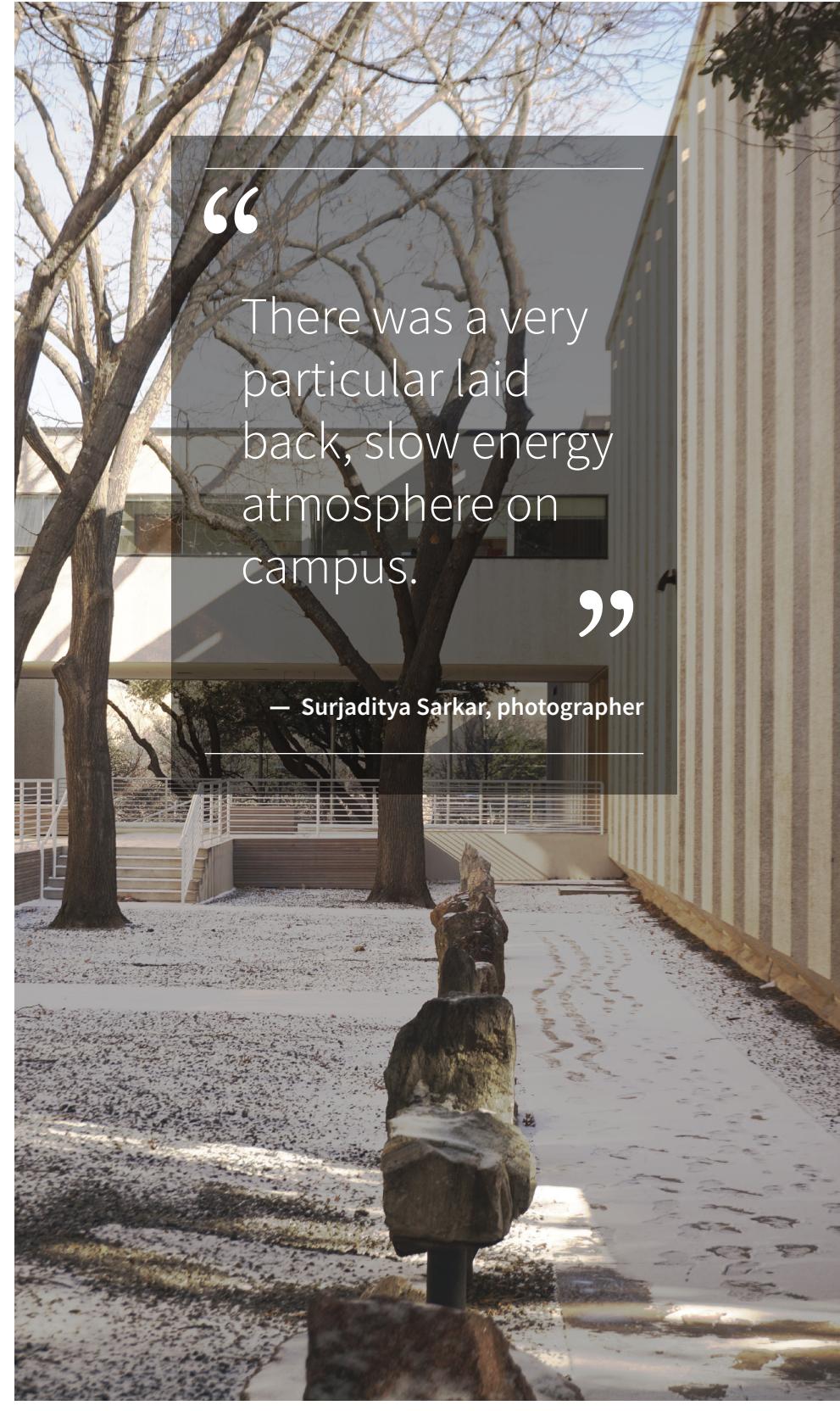
34 That makes sense
35 Singer Turner
37 Sound
40 Sri
41 Starbucks flavor
43 Brush aside
44 State of many ancient Roman cities
46 Delicate
48 " Doodle"
50 Oodles
52 One end of a battery
53 Drivable toy, for short
54 Stints in prison or in office
55 Feet, in slang
56 Give off
57 Spanish house
58 -nosed kid
62 Egg: Prefix



Flurries land on campus

When imagining the winter weather, thoughts of snowball fights, heavy layers of clothing and a steady flurry of snow come to mind. And while a winter storm moved into North Texas on Jan. 14, UTD didn't quite receive a winter wonderland as snow only lightly covered some areas of campus and melted as the afternoon sun made an appearance. Dying grass peeked out from under the frost as students braved the cold to visit campus landmarks, like the frozen reflecting pools

and the snow-covered Jack Kilby statue. Comets also made their own mark in the snow, leaving footprints or drawing designs and words in the slush throughout campus. Because of the snow flurries and inclement weather, the first day of classes on Jan. 16 was canceled to the delight of many Comets, giving them time to watch the remaining ice and frost melt before the start of spring semester.



“There was a very particular laid back, slow energy atmosphere on campus.”

— Surjaditya Sarkar, photographer



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF



A screencap from the movie, depicting the plane crash's survivors huddled together next to the wreckage from the plane's fuselage. Community and togetherness are the film's central themes, emphasized through the characters' physical proximity.

'Society of the Snow' portrays pure realism

J.A. Bayona allows the victims of the 1972 Andes flight disaster to share the emotional side of the tragic story.

MIA NGUYEN

Life & Arts Editor

It's old news that Hollywood likes to butcher true stories to make genres like true crime more marketable, substituting reality with sensationalized scenes made to garner shock over anything else. Director J.A. Bayona refuses to let the story of 45 Uruguayans get this treatment; his new film "Society of the Snow" (or "La sociedad de la nieve") treats the Uruguayan 1972 Andes flight disaster with loving care and humanizes the figures involved.

The film follows the true story of a devastating plane crash that killed many of its 45 passengers and left the survivors

of the initial crash stranded in the Andes mountains for over 70 days. The survivors had improper clothing, little food, only a broken chunk of the plane for shelter and a handful of injured to care for — and still they made it through. "Society of the Snow" uses an admirable cast, unique filming processes and an impeccable score to create a heart-wrenching film that prioritizes realism over spectacle.

Critics have compared "Society of the Snow" to the film "Alive" (1993), which tells a similar story of an Uruguayan Rugby team who must survive in the Andes. This previous rendition uses a whitewashed cast and disrespectful character tropes in attempts to make a real story into a glam-

orized and gory flick fit for a "Mission Impossible" fanatic. Bayona's film is the complete opposite, weaving a story that is an ode to both survivors and the deceased. The authenticity of the film comes from the director and writers' years of research, conducting personal interviews with the survivors, obtaining permission from the families of the deceased and hiring a Spanish-speaking cast.

The cast — consisting of Argentinian and Uruguayan actors — shatters viewers' souls through the characters' despair and hopelessness, but even more amazingly, they make it easy to smile with them and

SEE SNOW, PAGE 8

'Saltburn' puts more than a sprinkle of depravity on your For You page

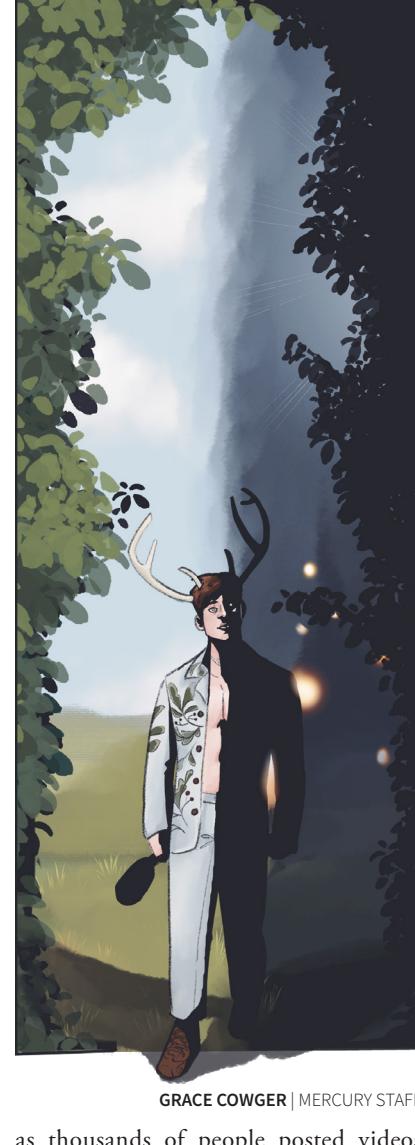
KAVYA RACHEETI
Mercury Staff

Grave fucking. A man eating semen out of a bath drain. These motifs for obsession and power — all jaw-droppingly unorthodox — are what drives Emerald Fennell's "Saltburn" into the center of the buzz on social media.

"Saltburn" follows Oliver Quick's (Barry Keoghan) descent into an almost primal desire for wealth and power as his unhealthy and emotionally charged friendship with influential Felix Catton (Jacob Elordi) develops during his stay on the family's opulent estate, Saltburn. The intrigue for this film stems from the lengths Oliver goes through to weave his way into the lavish Catton lifestyle, seducing and manipulating the residents of Saltburn in grotesque ways.

The driving force behind "Saltburn" is its shock value, as it not only accepts, but embraces the bizarre. And with scenes as appalling as the infamous graveyard scene and bathtub scene, as well as quickly releasing the film onto Amazon Prime (where it is currently available to stream), it didn't take long for people to begin discussing this film on social media. While the overall message of "Saltburn" is about how the desire for wealth and power transcends social status, the conversation on social media shifted towards how that obsession manifests through actions the audience considers the pinnacle of infatuation — sex and murder, displayed in ways that almost blur the line between disturbing and comical.

The film's popularity also boosted the soundtrack, as Sophie Ellis-Bextor's 2001 "Murder on the Dancefloor" entered the US Billboard Top 100 after 23 years. The song's newfound success can be tied to it going viral on social media,



GRACE COWGER | MERCURY STAFF

as thousands of people posted videos recreating Barry Keoghan's nude dance.

One of the immediate captivating aspects of "Saltburn" is the cinematography. Shot in 35mm and on a 4:3 aspect ratio, the film cements the old money aesthetic and atmosphere of the film: luxurious yet claustrophobic. A notable

SEE SALTBURN, PAGE 8

Shinto beauty: Meet the Mingei Movement celebrating the humble

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Mercury Staff

The Crow Museum of Asian Art at UTD exhibited everyday items made from ceramics and textiles which are particularly praised by followers of Shintoism.

Available until April 14, 2024, these art pieces are part of an existing exhibit — Japan, Form and Function: The Montgomery Collection — and housed in a large section called “the Mingei Movement.” Mingei translates to “art of the people” or “people’s art.” Displayed objects in the museum collection are items of everyday use, such as plates and bowls.

“The reason we call it ‘form and function’ is because it’s a beautiful shape,” said Irene Martin, guest consultant for the Montgomery Collection. “It’s beautiful work, and every single thing has a function. It’s not just a decorative piece that you show [off].”

Martin pitched the concept for the exhibit to Jeffrey Montgomery, a Swiss collector, suggesting they use the 1,000 works he had collected over 40 years to explain their connection to the oldest Japanese religion, Shintoism.

“Everything has its meaning coming out of its culture and ... a lot of it has religious meaning,” Martin said. “But it’s all tied into their everyday life.”

The objects in this exhibit reflect the ingrained customs in traditional Japanese life. Martin said Shinto shrines are generally placed in the kitchen area of a household. Every morning, before rice is served to members of the household, the first bowl is served to the Shinto shrine alongside a fresh bowl of water as an offering. This offering is addressed to kami, or Japanese Shinto gods.

The Mingei movement began in the period after World War I, and persisted through World War II. During this time, conflict left many Japanese citizens poor and struggling for food.

“They [Japanese people] made use of every bit they were given,” Martin said. “During and after World War II the people had a hard



time finding enough food; thus, I was told to eat every grain of rice in my bowl by my grandmother and to be thankful I had rice to eat.”

The Mingei Movement was founded during the mid-1920s as Japan was transitioning from a democratic government to a nationalistic regime. The founder of this movement, Yanagi Sōetsu, was against the consumerism and modernization Japan was borrowing from the Western world. He wanted to share the ordinary people’s artisanal objects items — which lacked critical acclaim — instead of praising mass-produced objects.

“The Mingei movement itself is made by artists who tried to emulate the artisans who produced these works for ordinary use,” Martin said. “They’re essentially the disciples of the original.”

When discussing the rise of consumerism today, Martin emphasized that these utilitarian items were valued and used for extended periods of time.

“It can be very crude objects, but they always seem to have a sense of beauty,” Martin said. “You buy them for your own use, and you use them and reuse them constantly. They [Japanese people] have a sense of conservation of objects in their tradition, in their culture.”



PHOTOS BY KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR

furries of UTP: just like you and me

Dressing up as animals brings these Comets together, students say, and brings opportunities for social and personal growth

SOFIA MEINARDUS
Mercury Staff

Walking down Rutherford Avenue on Halloween, you may see something unexpected: a parade of students dressed up as humanoid animals, with furry bodies and cartoonish eyes. These Comets are furries, people who dress up as anthropomorphic animals, and they say their community offers opportunities for social engagement, academic development and emotional support.

The UTD furry community, which began in 2018 with approximately 20 members, now includes hundreds. Anyone can join so long as they have an interest in anthropomorphic animals. However, this growth has not come without its challenges. Jonathan Gerhart, a fifth year ITS student and events coordinator for the UTD furry community, said that due to its rapid growth, the community is disorganized, making it difficult to become an official student organization. The group interacts both over Discord and in person, where creating personalized fursonas — or anthropomorphic animal personas — provides a unique sense of identity for its members.

“We are bound together by a very innate and personal way that we experience our lives through our personas of anthropomorphic animals,” Gerhart said. “Some people just like the art, for some people, it’s an inner reflection of their own being.”

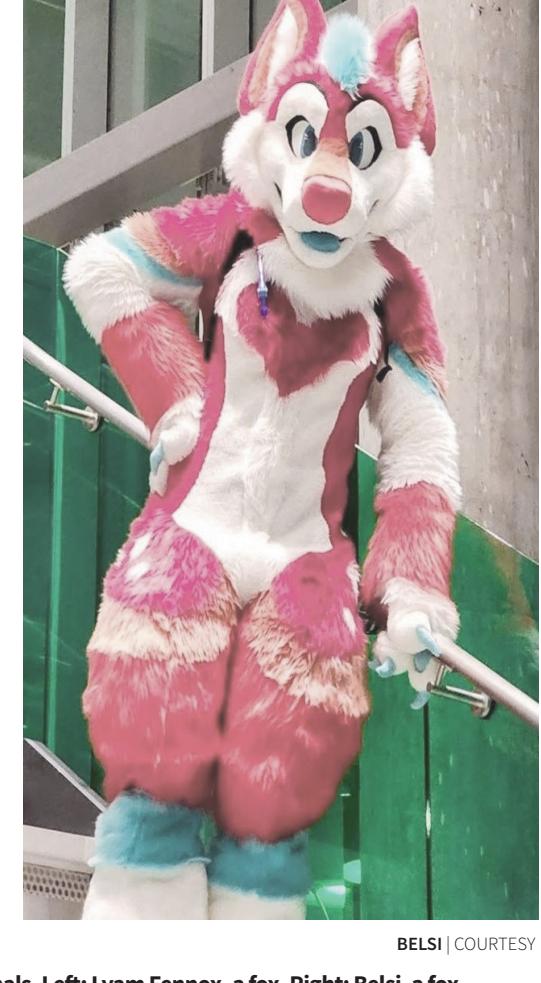
Gerhart said the group has faced some internal fragmentation over the prospect of becoming an official student organization, as some members feel anxious over sharing their real names or net IDs.

“It’s always met with mixed responses from leadership, and most recently it encouraged a change of leadership,” Gerhart said. “There is just so much fear in the UTD furry community of ridicule and rejection.”

Belsi, a computer science senior and head moderator of the furry discord server, said that UTD furries use both Discord and Telegram to discuss shared interests and classes as well as organize events. They also said the furry community helps members navigate college — both academics and career opportunities — and supports its members.

“I’ve gotten way more support from the furry community at UTD than [from] anything academic or professional,” Belsi said. “It’s been very impactful from my college experience [in] lots of ways ... It’s been very beneficial for me socially and so it’s helped me understand and appreciate my identity as a gay man, being able to be a part of a community that is as it is.”

Computer science freshman Brayden Chung said he first became interested in the furry community



KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR

Furries express themselves through unique fursonas, which are personas modeled on anthropomorphic animals. Left: Lyam Fennox, a fox. Right: Belsi, a fox.

through Echo, a furry visual novel centered around psychological horror.

“They’re normal,” Chung said. “They’re more normal than I thought. It’s not a furry that happens to be a CS student. It’s more like a student that happens to be a furry.”

UTD furries found Chung on Discord after looking for other students who might be furries; after seeing his profile picture of a cougar, they sent him a DM. After joining, he updated his profile picture to his fursona, first a blue canine and later a brown cat with small blue horns. He said that not every furry owns a physical fur suit and not everyone in the furry community wants a fur suit; Chung himself originally dismissed the idea but has now considered a partial suit, typically consisting of a head and paws. He said that a fursona is an opportunity to act as someone else.

“It’s different for everyone,” Chung said. “In some cases, it’s an idealized version of a person, but in other cases, it is just them as a person ... I want myself to be

more huggable or my persona to be more huggable, so I’ll make it fluffy.”

Chung said he initially disliked furries, as he thought the community fetishized animals. But after interacting with furries at UTD, he found this untrue.

“I want to say that it is not a sexual thing...[instead] it’s an easy way to meet new people on campus,” Chung said.

Gerhart said the Discord holds weekly “fur meets” somewhat discreetly, as only furries are invited directly. However, others can come as a plus-one. Events hosted on campus include their annual Halloween march, where participants put on their fur suits and walk down Rutherford Avenue. Gerhart and others also come together to attend meetups like the Furry Fiesta in Dallas which, according to WikiFur.com, is fourth-most attended furry meetup in the world.

“When I did get a fur suit, I was able to wear my fur suit and walk around on campus with all these other furries,” Belsi said. “Some people thought it was weird,

some people thought it was funny. But overall, there was just a lot of positivity and lots of fun just having that experience with my friends and seeing random people smile and wave.”

Gerhart said he actively looks for other furries on campus to bring them into the fold, looking for students with furry-related attire from masks to shirts. He said the community is highly social and values respect and non-judgment in their interactions with others.

“If you think that you are a furry or if you’re curious about joining us, just reach out. If you see someone in the UTD Discord with a furry profile picture, they’ll send you in the right direction,” Gerhart said. “We’re here to help. We’re here to protect our own. We’ll help you, and we’ll give you a sense of community ... I think we’re something special here at UTD, and I hope that other people can find their home here in the furry community.”

Green Day saves their fading reputation with 'SAVIORS'

MARIA SHAIKH
Opinion Editor

Although most casual listeners have only heard tracks from "American Idiot," Green Day and their furious, political, deliciously all-American pop punk has remained a household name for fans of alternative music since the '90s. Their 14th studio album, "SAVIORS", meets the incredible precedent set by "American Idiot" and other indisputable classics like "Dookie" — a welcome redemption following their recent albums' missteps.

Fans who disliked the band's poppy, overprocessed sound in their previous album "Father of All Motherf*ckers" will be delighted to sink their teeth into "SAVIORS." This album showcases Green Day at their best. Get past the forgettable and lyrically middling "The American Dream is Killing Me" as the opening track, and relish in the choppy vocals and power chords of "Look Ma! No Brains" that bring back the deliciously dirty energy of Green Day's youth. Lose yourself next in Tre Cool's mind-melting drumming that closes out "Coma City" with a crash-crash-crash — a welcome surprise after the juvenile beats of "Father of All Motherf*ckers." Strong guitars, enrapturing basslines and sincerity to the punk style make "SAVIORS" sound like an encore to "American Idiot" and an homage to the rawer, grittier crunch of their musical past, with lyrical work to match.

Frontman Billie Joe Armstrong might not be punk's most inspired lyricist, but the interpersonal pain and American anguish he captures in short stanzas shine bright in this album. In "Dilemma," Armstrong sing-screams "I was sober, now I'm drunk again / I'm in trouble and in love again / I don't wanna be a dead man walking" with the desperation of someone who clings to recovery from addiction with a bleeding vice grip, and the power of someone who is finally fully secure in the progress they've made. While "Still Breathing" — another powerful song about addiction recovery from the band's 2016 album "Revolution Radio" — was an affirmation of life and ode to Armstrong's persistence, "Dilemma" is a reflection: a testament to and acknowledgement of the road that led here.

"Suzie Chapstick" might not have the life-ruining nostalgic power of American Idiot's "Whatsername," but its sweet lyrics — "Did we get over our innocence / did we take the time to make amends?" — gently couched in Armstrong's heartfelt, pleading falsetto had



YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

me dangerously close to calling some exes. Not to mention the soul-wrenching emotion Armstrong packs into "Father to a Son," a song I can clearly imagine him playing on an acoustic guitar in the dim lighting of his son's bedroom, voice softened with love.

Like most of Green Day's work, "SAVIORS" is unabashedly political. "The American Dream is Killing Me" is a trite, if enjoyable, jab at capitalism, while other tracks like "Strange Days are Here to Stay" and "Living in the 20s" offer more multilayered critiques using Armstrong's quintessential image

of tainted, anti-divine suburbia. "SAVIORS" captures today's political moment exceptionally well, with a perfect balance of punk-rock anger, helpless apathy and yearning.

The album's biggest flaws stem from its mediocre opening track and the fact that "One Eyed Bastard" sounds better suited for Green Day's previous album than this one. It's a fun, playful track with lyrics that could be written by a mafia gangster, but carries distinct carelessly-made-for-commercial-radio energy that impedes the flow of an otherwise well-structured track list. On every

other count, though, "SAVIORS" soars. Rob Cavallo's production has created mouthwatering earworms that have fans clamoring for his return on future albums. Warm acoustic strumming and machine-gun snares meld together in a delectable medley of tempo and genre, running the listener through a highlight reel of Green Day's best ideas since their first practice session. "Bobby Sox" even indulges queer fans with a slower, romantic reprise on Armstrong's bisexuality complete with heart-stuttering screams; the perfect song for any romantic confession.

As much as it pains me to dethrone "Revolution Radio" as my go-to Green Day album, "SAVIORS" will be all I'm queueing for the next few months. More than anything, it feels like a love letter: to the fans of Green Day's rock operas, of previous decades' pop punk, of loving earnestness, of incomprehensible lyrics and the musical prowess of bassist Mike Dirnt and drummer Tre Cool. Think what you will about their previous discography, but there's no doubt that "SAVIORS" is the salvation Green Day fans have been seeking.

SNOW

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

a surge of life in a setting that is completely devoid of life. The paradox of human kindness amongst the barren landscape can be seen through its characters. Numa (Enzo Vogrincic) remains a gentle soul throughout the film despite his suffering. Roberto (Matias Recalt) uses his analytical mind and knowledge as a medical student to keep his friends alive. Cousins Fito (Esteban Kukuruzka) and Daniel (Francisco Romero) take on the grueling task of preparing the human flesh for consumption so their friends can sustain themselves with less guilt. Nando (Agustín Pardella) forces himself to train and regain physical strength to make the 10-day walk that eventually saves his friends. Every actor is so impactful; you never forget their characters' motivations and personalities despite the cast being so large.

The likability of these characters and the raw, emotional power the actors possess balances the horrors of the event and allows the viewers to feel like a part of the group. And by using unknown actors, the separation between the actors and the real figures becomes blurred, leading to total immersion. The film also honors the survivors by giving some of them cameos.

It can be hard to cement the impor-

tance of all the deceased with a two and a half hour run time, but the script allows the characters and the audience to mourn every death through brief flashbacks and visual descriptions of the deceased's name and age. Numa narrates throughout the film, his soothing and gentle voice contrasting with the coldness of their environment. In some films, narration is used for lazy storytelling, moving the plot along without meaningful dialogue or character interactions. This is not the case in "Society of the Snow" because the narration shows that the dead and the living are equally important and present. Even after his death, Numa continues to narrate and be present in his friends' lives through his bodily sacrifice and moral code.

The film is incredibly immersive — rare in the entertainment industry — because of Bayona's decision to film most of the events chronologically and in the freezing environmental conditions of the Sierra Nevada and the real crash site in the Andes. By filming scenes from the first day in the mountains to the day Nando and Roberto return to civilization, and by having the actors lose weight gradually throughout filming, the cast is able to feel what their real-life counterparts experienced. These filming decisions along with the subtle and gradual SFX makeup resulted

in a realistic decline in health for the characters, with cracked lips, snow-burnt skin and worsening injuries.

The score, composed by Michael Giacchino, also helps with this immersion, inviting viewers to feel the wide range of emotions the characters experience. From the moment the plane crashes, the music is filled with anxiety-ridden instrumentals. Even when the soundtrack is calm, hints of eerie sounds sneak in, showing that even when calm persists on the mountain, death is always in the forefront of the boys' minds. The compositions "Home" and "Found" are enough to send the viewer into a sobbing, bumbling mess, feeling the mixed bag of returning to your family while leaving the remains of your fallen friends and the society that has been your home for 72 days.

In survival stories like "Yellowjackets" and "Lord of the Flies," the surviving group dissolves under chaos, but Bayona's film differs greatly by giving the characters strong positive male friendships. The boys find that all social norms and rules are nonexistent in the Andes, and they must do the unthinkable. But they still create an unspoken pact to care for each other, a society formed on the mutual desire to survive, and focusing on these connections results in a heartfelt story rather than

one focused on cannibalism and conflict. These expressions of healthy masculinity are refreshing, and whether it's physically caring for one another or just shouldering each other's mental burdens, the film shows that to have human connection is to live.

"Society of the Snow" is tragic and soul-crushing, but also strangely comforting. There is a warmth from the character relationships that almost makes the audience forget they are watching a tragic event un-



NETFLIX | COURTESY

SALTBURN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

example of this is the scene where Felix leads Oliver through the manor, shot as though the audience is standing in place of Oliver, which truly emphasizes the sinking feeling of a lack of belonging to a part of the world that is so strikingly opulent. The 4:3 aspect ratio, formally known as the 'Academy ratio,' is

the same one used for older movies like "Citizen Kane" and "Casablanca" and gives "Saltburn" a vintage look and furthers the feeling of luxury through the lens of generation wealth.

Though the entire cast brings on performances that are profound and memorable, the stand-outs of "Saltburn" are the two leads, Barry Keoghan and Jacob Elordi.

Keoghan does a masterful job at por-

traying a man possessed by desire. Keoghan proves the depths of his range as a performer in a way unprecedented with most modern films through his ability to slowly unwrap the layers of Quick's character, having the audience view him initially as an awkward yet endearing person, to someone who is persistently concealed. Keoghan's performance is what makes "Saltburn" tense and uneasy, as the audience's understanding of

Oliver convolutes.

Elordi, on the other hand, gives a performance that somehow personifies the idea of impossibility. Elordi manages to play Felix in a way that really encapsulates the duality of his character, an exception to the stereotype of rich people by being a genuinely kind person. An example of this is the repeated monologue of Elordi as he lounges around the manor's grounds, which really captures

Felix's duality. His mannerisms, innocent and playful, while placed in such lavish settings, juxtaposes the audience in simultaneously feeling a sense of admiration for Felix and a disdain for his wealth and blissful ignorance.

Fennell's "Saltburn" is alluring with its shock value, hybrid 2000s and extravagant dark academia aesthetic and compelling performances, yet fails to deliver in social commentary.

AUSTIN PAGE TURNS A NEW PAGE

Center Austin Page took the fall semester off from basketball – on his return, he immediately became a leading scorer



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR, PHOTOS: KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR, SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

HYUN LIM
Mercury Staff

After taking the fall semester off from basketball, sophomore center Austin Page leaped back onto the court swiftly bringing hot shooting and a fiery spirit. His career-high performance of 28 points on Jan. 13 marked a remarkable come-back only two weeks after his return, and ever since he's consistently led the team in scoring.

With multiple accomplishments under Page's name, including being named UTD Athlete of the Week twice, ASC player of the week and being one of only five players selected for the D3 hoops national team of the week in the entire country, Page has kept his drive and doesn't plan to stop now. This season, Page made 16 assists, 13 blocks and six steals at the time of publication. Page said he hopes to continue improving and playing well for the team to secure an ASC championship win.

"The first semester was really tough for me because I had a bunch of personal issues I needed to attend to, but I tried to stay as active as I could," Page said. "I couldn't practice with the players, but I'd obviously watched every single practice and it was honestly a lot of determination to just work out alone and in my own time outside of the practice times to really improve my skill set in basketball."

Page took a break from playing basketball at the start of the season to improve his mental health and focus on mechanical engineering academics. After getting back on track with the basketball team, Page played his first game on Dec. 29 in California. From there, Page started to become a primary scorer on the team along with another teammate, senior Donovan Souter. Page said that he has never been a leading scorer – usually being the third or fourth top scorer – but that it has been a great feeling for him to help the team through playing how he knows best.

"It is kind of a rush of energy just knowing that it's never happened before," Page said. "It's a great feeling knowing that you're helping out the team consistently every week with scoring and everything."

Page was recruited by head men's basketball coach Jared Fleming. Fleming said Page had a great first year where he set the school record field goal percentage and knew from first

sight that he wanted to recruit Page.

"He can do everything well, he's talented, he can score, he plays hard, he defends, he rebounds and he just checked all the boxes for us that we wanted [during the recruitment process]," Fleming said. "So, we knew pretty quickly that he was a guy that was going to be on our radar, and a guy that we were going to pursue pretty heavily."

Averaging 18.1 points every game, Page's best game yet was on Jan. 13 with a career high of 28 points. Thanks to Page's efforts, the men's basketball team won against LeTourneau with the best margin of the season, the final score being 103-81.

"I'd say going into the game, scoring the first six points kind of gave me a rush of energy and just kind of wanted me to excel to even try even harder and harder, just scoring more points and helping the team out," Page said. "I felt like I needed to step in even more and get the team going as we went on a big run in the half and ended up scoring 20 points in the first half which was a huge accomplishment for me especially since it is almost rare to do so."

After coming back from his break, Page said that he was able to gain more confidence, which he said helps him in his games. Although being a freshman on a college basketball team can be stressful, Page said that he has learned how to calm his emotions and embrace who he is as a person, which he said has really helped his confidence while playing games.

Page has been on the basketball team since freshman year, and Fleming said that there was a huge improvement in Page from freshman to sophomore year. Fleming said that Page's determination and hard work allows him to improve his skill set for the basketball team and that he is on pace to break the record for field goal percentage again this year.

"When Austin got to us as a freshman, he was talented, but he didn't really know what it took to kind of play at this level and it took him a little while to figure some of that out," Fleming said. "He probably made the biggest jump from freshman to sophomore year in how much he improved. He really started clicking new things

“It's a great

feeling knowing that you're helping out the team consistently every week with scoring.”

”

— Austin Page

Basketball spotlight: Alex Bowman making waves at UTD

Three time athlete of the week, Bowman – who continues to lead the women's team in shooting – has sights set on ASC championship

AAFIYA ASLAM
Mercury Staff

Senior forward Alex Bowman shined with the first double-double in her career, scoring 20 points and 10 rebounds on Jan. 18 against Sul Ross State University. Since transferring to UTD, she has dominated the court and claimed Athlete of the Week recognition three times.

On Nov. 13, 2023, Jan. 8, 2024 and Jan. 22, 2024, Bowman received Athlete of the Week for outstanding performance in her games, one of which was her major contribution to the Comets' victorious 69-55 match against SRSU. Bowman said she is looking forward to the Comets' last year playing in the ASC conference.

"It's finally nice to be appreciated

and have people see the fruits of my labor and all the hard work I've put into this," Bowman said.

Bowman said her drive for playing basketball is her siblings; she is the eldest sister and wants to create an example for what it means to be successful and have someone to be proud of. Bowman she has overcome anxiety through playing the sport, as basketball helped her build confidence and gain a sense of achievement.

"It just helps me be successful and kind of guide me through life," Bowman said. "And I've learned so many things throughout my career that I'll be able to take with me through the rest of my life and into my career professionally."

Bowman described her play style as

calming. She said that when teammates become overwhelmed on the court, she helps them focus so they can still execute plays.

"It's taking it in ... what's going on with the defense, seeing your open teammates, seeing if you have an open shot or you can drive to the basket for a layup," Bowman said. "Just really taking in what you're seeing and making quick decisions and not getting too carried away and trying to go fast."

Bowman's most memorable game was the 2021-22 ASC Conference championship in Marshall, Texas where UTD played against University of Mary-Hardin Baylor as a tiebreaker. Shortly after winning the match, Bowman made the All-Tournament team.

"She hit a monster shot in the fourth

quarter to send them to overtime, and they ended up winning in overtime," said Joseph Shotland, head coach of the women's basketball team.

UTD's sports teams will transition to the Lone Star Conference in Division II, meaning this is their last year to compete in the ASC. Bowman and her team are now on the way to this goal, having defeated the University of the Ozarks 60-46 on Jan. 24 and 78-51 on Jan. 27.

"There's a lot of pride on the line, and we just really want [to win], and it means a lot to us because we want to repeat and go back to the championship," Bowman said. "We're

UTD ATHLETICS | COURTESY

taking it one game at a time, not trying to get ahead of ourselves."

Despite being a transfer student from Blinn College, Bowman said she is doing her best to balance her academics and basketball career at UTD thanks to her time management skills.

Bowman tries to practice for at least 30 minutes every day and then study for her classes until late in the night. On the court at UTD, she knew she would still perform well even though she transitioned to a more

SEE ALEX, PAGE 11

Women's, men's basketball climb the charts in final run for ASC



NAHUM PILLI | MERCURY STAFF

Senior guard Donovan Souter gets ready to pass the ball to his teammate.

AARAV DEV
Mercury Staff

The UTD women's basketball team defeated Sul Ross State 69-55 on Jan. 18, improving their standing to 14-4, their best record through 16 games since the 2020-21 season. In contrast, the UTD men's team lost to SRSU 66-65 in one of the Comets' closest games of the season, bringing their three-game win streak to an abrupt end.

Starting with the women's Jan. 18 game, the Comets never trailed, ending the first half of the game in the lead with a score of 31-26 and finishing with a strong second half to increase the winning margin to 14 points.

Now ranking second in the ASC, the men's basketball team kept it close out the gates at the beginning of their game before

going on a 19-3 run to go up by a score of 28-14. However, the visiting SRSU Lobos responded with an 11-1 run to close out the

“I really honed in on my offensive contributions to the game. It comes with the flow of the game.”

— Alex Bowman

first half with a 29-25 Comets lead. UTD had a strong start to the second half before

the Lobos went on a 10-0 run to take a two-point lead. After that, the game was neck and neck, with nine lead changes in the second period. With less than one second remaining, SRSU guard Gabe Sanchez hit the game's winning shot, resulting in a narrow Lobos victory.

Senior forward Alex Bowman had a career setting night: she posted 20 points and 10 rebounds, both of which set new career highs and is her first career double-double. She also recorded two blocks and two steals.

"I really honed in on my offensive contribution to the game," Bowman said. "It comes with the flow of the game."

The women's team distributed the ball

SEE BASKETBALL, PAGE 11

Softball teams up for final ASC run

TYLER BURKHARDT
Mercury Staff

In their last season as a Division III program, the UTD softball team sports high expectations and a close-knit identity.

While they are not the top-ranked team in the ASC, Head Coach Kelly Archer said that the Comets are still hoping to compete for the conference title as they begin to prepare for the transition to being an NCAA DII team next year. Several new Comets will bolster the roster, and the team has emphasized improving its offense this season. In addition to on-field preparations, a key ingredient for a successful softball season is team chemistry. Archer said he has never seen a closer bunch of girls before – in large part because of the death of Coach Abby Sterling last fall.

“A lot of teams say that they’re like a family ... but with what these girls have been through, my team is living it,” Archer said. “These players want to win. But I think for them, it’s even more important to be together. We want to

have a good season, we expect to win a lot of games, but we are also living the mantra that there are things more important than how many games you win.”

In the off-season, Archer said the softball field was “their place.” When the Athletics department offered the team a conference room on campus to meet in, the players instead



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

From left to right: Outfielders #18 Megan Cavazos, #3 Megan Zatopek and #22 Kailey Gonzales running drills at practice.

opted to set up a portable fireplace in the outfield. The team could frequently be found gathered there to spend time together, even after practices stopped in the winter.

“After mourning, it was easy to be around one another all the time,” healthcare management senior Megan Zatopek said. “We helped distract each other from what was happening in life.”

The players are confident that this chemistry will translate to on-field success. Zatopek said that the team is committed to honoring their late coach with their performance this season. And Archer said that even though the team is now short a coach, the players asked that the department not hire

a replacement for Sterling until the end of the season.

“The 31 of us lost Abby together,” Archer said. “If you bring somebody in from the outside, they won’t understand. No matter how good of a coach they are, they didn’t go through this experience. So, they would rather play one coach short.”

On the field, the Comets had a strong defense last year and thrived on run prevention. However, they had a difficult time scoring runs — an anomaly for the Comets, who tend to have an offensively-oriented team identity — and ultimately were eliminated by Mary Hardin-Baylor in the ASC tournament. Archer said that the team, which returns its No. 2 and No.

3 pitchers from last year, is hoping to maintain the run-prevention element of their game while improving offensively in 2024.

“Defense is absolutely going to continue to be a highlight of the team,” said business administration junior Addison Caddell, last year’s All-ASC 3rd baseman. “And I think our hitting is going to come around this year, as well. Our energy is going to be super fun, and [people who

MEGAN ZATOPEK

AUSTIN
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

[in the] middle of freshman year, I think now he really understands a much higher level of work that’s required to perform at the college level so he’s a very hard worker, he works on all of his skills, he works on his free

throws every single day, he’s a hard worker, he’s a grinder, he’s a really competitive kid and it’s been a big boost for us.”

Fleming said Page has grown with the team and that if Page keeps playing the way he is, the team will be set for the ASC championships.

“Austin is a wonderful kid,” Fleming said. “He’s a huge personality, he’s a funny kid, the guys love him, he can be a little bit of a goofball at times but he’s very lovable. He’s a great kid, a great person, and we’re excited that he’s a part of our program.”

ALEX
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

competitive division.

“Coming from a junior college to Division III, it was different, but I knew that I would be able to do well, and I was excited,” Bowman said. “It was rough at first, but it’s definitely smooth sailing now.”

Shortland said that he is proud of Bowman’s growth throughout the season and that she is improving with making correct reads on game strategies. Shortland also said Bowman goes with the flow of the game without making interruptions.

“She doesn’t allow the highs and lows of the game to take her away from doing the things that make her great ... she’s an exceptional player,” Shortland said.

Shortland said he has noticed the effort Bowman puts into the team and said she is one of the “big time players” on the court.

“I say [hardworking] knowing that there are a lot of people that go through the motions and all sorts of things, and Alex is not one of them,” Shortland said. “Alex really squeezes each day for everything. It’s worth her sacrifices for this team and we’re just proud of her.”

ALEX BOWMAN

BASKETBALL
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

effectively, with four players scoring in the double-digits. In addition to Bowman, junior guard Trystan Clark posted 12 points and six rebounds to go along with three steals. Senior guard Blythe Williams scored 11 points and dished four assists, and sophomore guard Amanda Crowninshield contributed 11 points off the bench.

“You don’t go in thinking you’re gonna distribute it evenly, but we designed plays that are balanced and have multiple options,” women’s basketball coach Joseph Shortland said. “Hopefully we can continue to do that moving forward, because I think that’s gonna be really important for our offense to be balanced.”



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

Junior forward Rob Wade lines up a shot on Jan. 20 against the Howard Payne Buzzsaws.

come out] are going to see the hard work we put in this offseason.”

One possible difference-maker for the Comets is freshman recruit Cadence Hernandez. Archer said that the infielder, who primarily plays first base, hasn’t won the job yet — but as Hernandez was a two-time offensive player of the year in high school, she has the potential to be a big-time bat.

“I want to be able to make an impact at the plate,” Hernandez said. “That’s been one of the teams’ struggles in the past, and I think I can help with that.”

Another big addition is education junior Gracelyn Taylor. The catcher transferred to UTD from NCAA DII TWU, because of her familiarity with Coach Archer and her desire to join the Comets because of their team culture. She described the team as a group that will be competitive because the players constantly cheer each other on and refuse to give up.

“Our kids are confident in themselves, and they know they can compete,” Archer said. “We have beat top-10 ranked teams, and while we’re not ready to do that routinely, we’re competitive [in the ASC]. All things considered, we are in a pretty good place.”

The softball season will begin on Feb. 17 with a doubleheader at home against Ottawa University. All UTD students get free admission to the games if they present their Comet cards, and all of the players stressed how much it means when students do show up to support the team.

“I don’t think people realize how fun it is to be out here, even just to watch,” biochemistry senior Olivia Reed said. “UTD has a great community here, and hopefully, we’ll get more students to come see it.”

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Student Fee Advisory Committee

Please visit the website for Spring Schedule

studentaffairs.utdallas.edu/studentfee

CHESS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

a total score of 4.5 out of six points.

“Team B was really helpful in paving the way ... Team B was the first to strike and dunked on one of the favorites, Saint Louis University,” Sadorra said. “And the MVP of Team B was Andrei Macovei.”

Taking part in the tournament for the second time, Macovei earned five out of six points, the highest among all board 2 players in the tournament. Despite what Macovei called a strong team chemistry, they failed to qualify for the final four after losing to stronger universities.

“I think our team played very strong teams, like we played [University of] Missouri, Webster B, UTRGV B. We actually faced a lot of top GMs,” Macovei said.

In the U1800 section, UTD Team E consisted of graduate students William Barrett Winchell and Nikhilesh Prabhakar and sophomores Louis-Alexandre Calvary and Benjamin Jeffery. They won three matches and drew three, making their total score of 4.5 out of six points.

“They fought hard, too,” Sadorra said. “It was rewarding in the last round when Team E had a clutch win as well.”

Jeffery, president of the UTD Chess Club, said he was happy with the big improvement from last year’s tournament.

“There’s no way that we could have placed third without the other teams chipping in and there’s a lot of communication between all three of the teams and we were helping each other with preparation and all that kind of stuff,” Jeffery said.

Prabhakar played in the Pan-Am for the first time and said that Jeffery and Calvary have both improved since last year in this tournament. Calvary jumped in rating from 1200 to 1900, Prabhakar said.

Jeffery said his best game was in round 3 against James Rhoads, the chess coach from Shippensburg University. Jeffery prepared and played the Sicilian defense Snyder variation with the white pieces. At first, Jeffery felt like he was struggling, but he managed to take advantage of the position and win the game.

“He’s actually a coach, so it’s always nice to beat people when you’re not the favorite, especially surprising them with something that they’ve never seen before,” Jeffery said.

Prabhakar considered Indiana University their toughest opponent due to the higher rated players on boards 1 and 2. As the final player of four to fin-

ish the match, Prabhakar said he felt pressured to secure a victory. Prabhakar won his game, and UTD Team E drew with Indiana University Team A thanks to what Prabhakar called mind games.

“[So] I was trying to show some sort of dominance by staring at my opponent’s face like playing over the board and trying to get him on edge,” Prabhakar said. “It definitely [worked] because he started spending 25 minutes on a single move.”

Sadorra, said it was a very decisive moment in the tournament from all the teams, and they performed well on that day.

“I believe that the players deserved it,” Sadorra said. “It’s encouraging that we were able to adjust from the past team competitions last year and see that oh, we’re hitting.”

Sadorra said he is looking forward to Team A playing in the final four at the President’s Cup. In the future, Sadorra would like to keep their current team roster, as he feels like they are on the right track.

“We are hitting something golden here, so we’re going to keep on going,” Sadorra said.

— Julio Sadorra

Biased Spirit Rocks reporting misrepresents Comets

Through picking and choosing which facts to report, major news publications imply Comets are divided about the rocks' removal

MARIA SHAIKH
Opinion Editor

"We are winning." "Love them both." "No peace on stolen land." Chances are, you remember reading those words on the Spirit Rocks last semester. But the story of UTD's infamous "rock wars" has been twisted to suit news outlets' personal narratives, endangering the truth and our school's reputation.

For many Comets, last fall was defined by the spray-paint war on the rocks sparked by the Israel-Hamas war, before Student Affairs suddenly removed the Spirit Rocks on Nov. 20. Hundreds of students and alumni expressed their disappointment with the decision and didn't go unheard — while the university stays silent on the removal, several news organizations have reported on this story and amplified Comets' anger. Not all coverage is created equal, however. While some publications have faithfully portrayed how Comets feel about the rocks' removal, other outlets have inaccurately framed the removal of the rocks as being more two-sided and tense than it actually was. To uninformed readers, these half-truths paint a false picture of Comets' actions and beliefs — something that will only change if students stand up for fair and accurate reporting.

Biased reporting like this is subtle but extremely insidious, as it weaves a false narrative through a series of nudges. Someone who was on campus during the situation can see through to the truth, but an uninformed reader might walk away with a completely mistaken impression. For instance, consider the Oct. 18 CBS article, written during the height of political painting on the Spirit Rocks. The article uses terminology like "tense," "critical point" and "sparked outrage" and centers its discussion on the rock graffiti that read "Zionism = Nazism." Since this is CBS' only coverage of the rock wars, it amounts to misrepresentation. "Zionism = Nazism" was a short-lived message on the rocks and accompanied paintings that could similarly offend pro-Palestinian students, such as "We are winning" atop an Israeli flag. And while several students



RAINIER PEDERSON | MERCURY STAFF

were upset by messages on the rocks, other students interviewed by *The Mercury* well as President Benson's own email to Comets described the back-and-forth as civil and polite. By failing to represent the full range of opinions on the rock wars, CBS implies that students almost universally disliked the paintings, and that the only important message painted was "Zionism = Nazism."

All of what CBS reported is technically true, but if a reader only has this article to learn from, they will be left with an incomplete picture of events. The reporting is false by omission. They might think "Zionism = Nazism" stayed up for several days, or that the "students [who have] been camping out at the rocks to quickly paint over any messages with opposing views" were primarily defending "Zionism = Nazism."

A more egregious example from the rock wars is *Dallas Express'* coverage published on Oct. 18. It makes the same rhetorical choices as the CBS article, with more obvious anti-Palestinian bias. It first introduces

that UTD's chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine helped coordinate the painting and that "the student group condemned the

"Our remarkable students, staff and faculty have gathered the best of themselves to engage with each other respectfully and civilly."

— President Benson in his Oct. 16 email

school's president, Richard Benson, for his statement against the "atrocities committed by the terrorist group Hamas." Such phras-

ing implies SJP only condemned Benson's letter because he disapproved of Hamas, even though their criticism was actually about Benson's failure to acknowledge Palestinian deaths while explicitly offering support and condolences to Jewish individuals. This presentation suggests SJP — and their side of the rock wars — promoted a senseless, inflammatory argument that they were never truly making. The story didn't accurately represent the pro-Palestinian students' anger with Benson. And, tellingly, the *Dallas Express* article didn't get quotes from a single pro-Palestinian source despite dedicating paragraphs to a local pro-Israel advocate.

By misrepresenting the situation, these news outlets give readers an inaccurate impression of what Comets truly believe. *Dallas Express* interviews no UTD affiliates and paints SJP as holding a fringe, incomprehensible belief. How would a reader know that SJP made an argument loved by hundreds on campus? Or that their events attract huge

crowds and that many Comets thought the rock wars were overall peaceful and respectful? CBS centers "Zionism = Nazism" as the crux of the rock wars, ignoring the fact that much of the back-and-forth didn't feature such inflammatory language.

The most offensive of all the previous months' reporting is CBS' article discussing the Spirit Rocks' removal. The article frames the issue as an equal duality starting from the title, saying that students express "relief, concern" over the removal, with no other context provided. The article implies there are just as many students "relieved" as there are students "concerned." This is blatantly false. *The Mercury's* own poll showed that 92% of over 1,500 respondents opposed the rocks' removal, and the 75 senators in Student Government passed a resolution unanimously demanding the rocks be reinstated. There is no 50/50 split in the way the article implies.

Clearly, large news outlets have misrepresented Comets' perspectives on the removal as well as their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is incredibly bad journalistic practice to cherry-pick which quotes and facts you use in an article, precisely because it creates false narratives that can leave a casual reader misinformed. To see this juvenile reporting from a publication as big as CBS is horribly disheartening. Their reach is massive. How many hundreds of viewers have seen that article and misunderstood UTD's school culture because of it? How many people have misunderstood you, what you stand for, and the school you attend because of it?

Is that something you're willing to let continue?

Skewed reporting like this is unacceptable when there is truth and our school's reputation on the line. I implore you to join me in emailing CBS to demand they revise the article on the Spirit Rocks removal. They need to add in *The Mercury's* poll results as well as make clear that the removal wasn't controversial, but rather that students almost universally agree it was bad.

Ideological conflicts will always thrive on campus. But if we don't demand accurate reporting today, deceitful journalists will tell even more lies about us tomorrow.

New year, new classes — but don't drop old friends

KAVYA RACHEETI
Staff Writer

New semesters are exciting because they offer one of the most enriching experiences campus life has to offer: new social opportunities, which are important in not just your growth as a student but as a person. But while it might be a "new year, new you," don't forget to maintain your budding friendships from previous semesters.

Our campus's social life is unorthodox compared to other colleges in Texas. Without a football team or other large social events bringing together the entire student body, it's easy to feel walled off from your peers, and like it's impossible to bring those walls down. And with that mindset, college can feel like being a faceless body in the crowd — singular and lonely. While it is normal to experience loneliness during a transitional period in life, attending a college with a strained social life doesn't help. And refusing to fight that loneliness could be damaging to your overall well-being — physically, emotionally, and mentally, which can affect

aspects of your life from motivation and focus to an increased risk of heart disease.

This is why it's imperative not just to connect with other people, but also to turn fleeting moments into lasting friendships. While you may not feel a connection with all 30,000 students here, you may find that bond with 10.

And you won't find those 10 people by talking to them for three months and then never again. Unless, if fate allows, the both of you have a class together the following semester. What you will find instead is a sense of superficiality in the relationships you make here. While you may find a good time in talking about a shared class or studying together, that might not always fulfill your social needs. Close emotional connections, often formed from personal conversations and hours spent together, are what some Comets are vocal about lacking. And the four years of undergrad can be a great place to find the friends you'll have for the rest of your life. That is, if you put the work in.

Not every single person you meet in college is destined to be your best friend

for all of eternity. And that's okay! You don't have to drop imperfect friendships, because it's important to have a variety of friends who can support you in a multitude of ways. While having one best friend is great, it's important to have friends that aren't equally close to you. But don't feel that every single person you meet is also meant to be a friend in the first place. Growing apart from people is natural, and a part of the human experience.

While you might believe that you're one of those people who thrive on making friends periodically or circumstantially, college is one of the last environments you can make friends through circumstance. People who make friends under circumstance tend to feel more isolated after they graduate, so having the skill to maintain and rekindle old connections is vital to addressing loneliness.

The best plan of action to achieve a well-rounded college experience is to maintain your old relationships by checking in on them once in a while. It doesn't have to be a dramatic, long-winded text proclaiming



ANIKA SULTANA | MERCURY STAFF

how much you've missed them and how you've longed for their company. But if that's your thing, then go for it. For me, it's as simple as replying to an Instagram story and letting conversation ebb and flow, or offering or inviting someone to get lunch at the Student Union.

Making friends is one of the most enriching experiences college has to offer, and the main thing you'll carry into your future aside from your education. So take some time out of your day to reach out to a friend from a class last semester.

EDITORIAL CARTOON



GRACE COWGER | MERCURY STAFF